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Susan E. Robertson

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Smiling and Nodding

by Susan E. Robertson



Susan E. Robertson is a graduate student and mother of two wonderful daughters. With her personal “time and money” she enjoys working on her old house and purchasing art supplies. You can reach her at srobertson@pps.net.

A year and a half ago I enrolled in the Portland State University Library Media Endorsement program. I’d spent years working in a bookstore and volunteering in my child’s school library and felt pretty certain a library career would be perfect for me. I pursued this career for many of the same reasons other librarians have: finding that perfect reference material for a teacher, teaching students how (and why) to make citations, breaking up fights for who gets to check-out the latest Pokemon Lego book (they’re passionate about reading!). These usual and solvable challenges are expected, relished and even exciting!

There’s one challenge that has me stumped. It’s an age-old problem. A challenge with no simple solution. “I’m supposed to do what? With how little time? And no money?” As you already know, there are actually two challenges here: time and money, or the lack of both. I recently began my student teaching (at the same school library where I volunteered) and mentioned to my cooperating teacher, Reba Parker, that I had noticed there was never enough time for her to do everything that needed to be done and there was no money. After I stated the obvious, I hoped she was going to tell me her secret for handling this mentally on a day-to-day basis or maybe share a helpful anecdote or mantra for me to repeat. Instead, she looked at me and smiled and nodded. Then, she looked at me and smiled and nodded some more.


There is really no easy solution for these challenges. Obviously, it would be helpful if I were issued magical-librarian powers with my teaching license, were a superhero, or was okay with breaking the law to print my own money (silver lining with this scenario . . . I could probably work in the penitentiary’s library once incarcerated.)

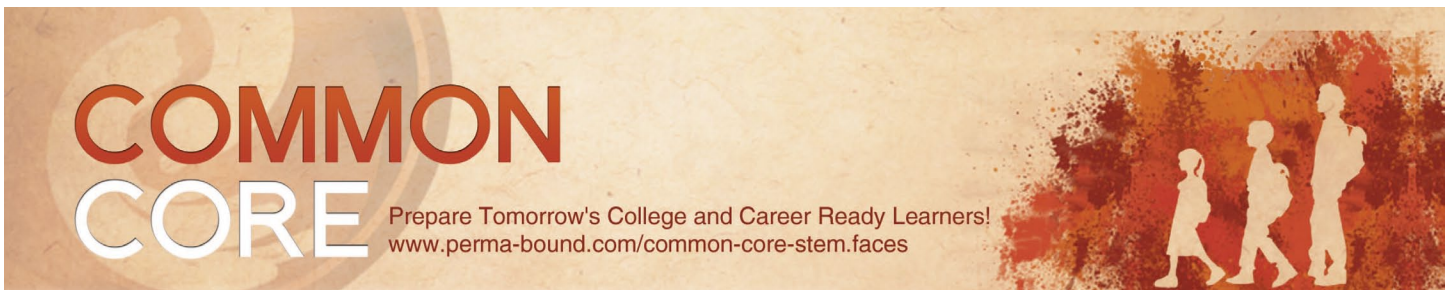
“You’re doing it again,” I said to Reba when she was nodding and smiling at me the next day after I brought up the topic again. After I pointed out that she needed to give her student teacher a pep talk, she eventually said, “It boils down to setting priorities and spending a lot of time to get what you need.” (There’s that time thing again.)

Ultimately, a school librarian needs to get comfortable with the fact that there is going to be the discrepancy between the time and money allotted to do the job and what could be accomplished if there were plenty of time and money to do the job. I hope that makes sense. Maybe there’s a better way



to state it, such as, “You have to let some things go,” or simply, “Get over it.”

I’m betting on getting magical powers because from what I’ve seen so far there are plenty of school librarians making magic happen. They, however, would probably more accurately describe it as hard work. Hard work, and after smiling and nodding, they may also say it’s the donation of unpaid time to get the thing their program needs, *money*. 



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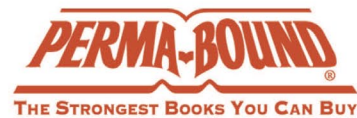
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